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NEWS

Parents, School Committee continue literacy conversation

ALISON SWALLOW | STAFF WRITER

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Winchester parents and school officials are continuing the conversation over how the district teaches reading. COURTESY PHOTO/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Parents continued to use the public comment time at the Jan. 30 [illegible] Committee to express concerns about the elementary level literac[illegible]

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curriculum in Winchester.

Laura Malone who has two young children and recently moved back to town, said she "was upset to learn that we are using a reading curriculum that is failing 1 in 3 students." She continued, "my concern after attending [the Jan. 23 public hearing] is how is the [fiscal year 2025] budget going to have room for any sort of improvements?"

Nora Cooney urged that, even though the budget is more limited compared to other towns because of Winchester's low commercial tax base, "to not let potential funding issues dictate recommendations. Let's figure out first what we need, and then figure out how to pay for it and how to prioritize that."

Leah Klein said the town is using a curriculum that "has been debunked" and asked "that we begin the process of removing the curriculum that we know is ineffective." She noted it probably won't be an easy process, but is necessary to ensure equity in the way the reading curriculum is applied, and urged the School Department to "make this happen by next year".

John Montgomery, whose two grandchildren will start elementary school soon, has been following the literacy issue for several years and wonders why nothing has happened in that time and why it isn't easier to find out what the curriculum is.

"I can tell from other towns what the curriculum is," he said. "Our communication is poor. You can't tell what the curriculum is; you can't tell who is making decisions."

Parents also asked that the School Committee consider hiring a third party to perform the process of evaluating the literacy curriculum, as well as provide an after school reading program "as a stop gap" to the cu issue.

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Following public comment, Superintendent Dr. Frank Hackett gave an update on where the evaluation process stands, noting he also sent an email to parents the previous week.

“The intent of the process is that we are looking to get feedback from those who are willing and able to come to these meetings and provide emails [and also to solicit] feedback from people who may not be comfortable emailing or speaking publicly,” he said.

Hackett added his “goal is to take the data, put them into numbers, so that we can start to remove some of the emotion from the conversation.”

Hackett noted the goal of the upcoming Feb. 13 meeting was to “provide the committee with an overview of what we do [and] clear up some misunderstandings and misconceptions about what we do.”

“It’s not true that we haven’t done anything for three years,” he added. “The hardest part is that the change process takes time.”

Finally, he confirmed the process of evaluating the literacy curriculum “will be done through a third party, from someone who knows how to design this kind of process.”

At a subsequent Parent to Parent sponsored Zoom with the superintendent on Feb. 8, Hackett gave more details about the process, saying “the design team will be working with the actual researchers in forming the questions, and working with educators” and the goal would be to have “broad representation of both educators as well as parents” on the design team.

He said the district would conduct surveys, small group discussions and focus group interviews to solicit feedback from parents, teachers a[illegible] stakeholders. In addition, he mentioned he had proposed three a[illegible]

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initiatives for the 2024-2025 school year, including an extended day literacy program.

The School Committee discussed these proposals in more depth at its Jan. 30 meeting and ultimately voted in favor of adding an additional $500,000 as a placeholder for the proposals.

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The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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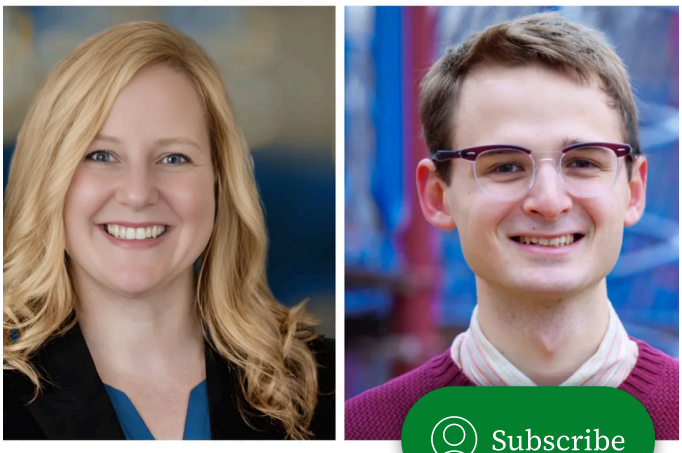

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

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FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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